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The 161 Laws of Wicca

by Gerald B. Gardner

1. The Law was made and ordained of old.
2. The Law was made for the Wicca, to advise and help in their troubles.
3. The Wicca should give due worship to the gods and obey their will, which they ordain, for it was made for the good of Wicca as the worship of the Wicca is good for the gods. For the gods love the brethren of Wicca.
4. As a man loveth a woman by mastering her.
5. So the Wicca should love the gods by being mastered by them.
6. And it is necessary that the Circle, which is the temple of the gods, should be truly cast and purified. And that it may be a fit place for the gods to enter.
7. And the Wicca shall be properly prepared and purified to enter into the presence of the gods.
8. With love and worship in their hearts, they shall raise power from their bodies to give power to the gods.
9. As has been taught of old.
10. For in this way only may men have communion with the gods, for the gods cannot help man without the help of man.
11. And the High Priestess shall rule her coven as the representative of the God.
12. And the High Priest shall support her as the representative of the God.

13. And the High Priestess shall choose whom she will, be he of sufficient rank, to be her High Priest.

14. For as the god himself kissed her feet in the fivefold salute, laying his power at the feet of the Goddess because of her youth and beauty, her sweetness and kindness, her wisdom and justice, her humility and generosity,

15. So he resigned all his power to her.

16. But the High Priestess should ever mind that all power comes from him.

17. It is only lent, to be used wisely and justly.

18. And the greatest virtue of a High priestess be that she recognize that youth is necessary to the representative of the goddess.

19. So she will gracefully retire in favor of a younger woman should the Coven so decide in council.

20. For a true High Priestess realizes that gracefully surrendering pride of place is one of the greatest virtues.

21. And that thereby she will return to that pride of place in another life, with greater power and beauty.

22. In the old days, when witchdom extended far, we were free and worshipped in all the greater temples.

23. But in these unhappy times we must celebrate our sacred mysteries in secret.

24. So be it ordained, that none but the Wicca may see our mysteries, for our enemies are many and torture loosens the tongue of man.

25. So be it ordained that no Coven shall know where the next Coven bide.

26. Or who its members be, save only the Priest and Priestess and messenger.

27. And there shall be no communication between them, save by the messenger of the gods, or the summoner.

28. And only if it be safe may the covens meet in some safe place for the great festivals.

29. And while there, none shall say whence they came nor give their true names.

30. To this end, any that are tortured in their agony may not tell if they do not know.

31. So be it ordained that no one shall tell anyone not of the craft who be of the Wicca, nor give any names or where they bide, or in any way tell anything which can betray any of us to our foes.

32. Nor may he tell where the Covendom be.

33. Or the Covenstead.

34. Or where the meetings be.

35. And if any break these laws, even under torture, THE CURSE OF THE GODDESS SHALL BE UPON THEM, so they may never be reborn on earth and may remain where they belong, in the hell of the Christians.

36. Let each High Priestess govern her Coven with justice and love, with the help and advice of the High Priest and the Elders, always heeding the advice of the messenger of the gods if he cometh.

37. She will heed all complains of all Brothers and strive to settle all differences among them.

38. But it must be recognized that there will always be people who will ever strive to force others to do as they will.

39. These are not necessarily evil.

40. And they oft have good ideas and such ideas should be talked over in council.

41. But if they will not agree with their Brothers, or if they say,

42. "I will not work under this High Priestess,"

43. It hath ever been the Old Law to be convenient to the Brethren and to avoid disputes.

44. Any of the third may claim to found a new Coven because they live over a league away from the Covenstead, or that they are about to do so.

45. Anyone living within the Covendom and wishing to form a new Coven shall tell the Elders of their intention and on the instant avoid their dwelling and remove to the new Covendom.

46. Members of the old Coven may join the new one when it is formed. But if they do, they must utterly avoid the old Coven.

47. The Elders of the new and the old Covens should meet in peace and brotherly love to decide the new boundaries.

48. Those of the craft who dwell outside both Covendoms may join either but not both.

49. Though all may, if the Elders agree, meet for the great festivals if it be truly in peace and brotherly love,

50. But splitting the Coven off means strife, so for this reason these Laws were made of old and may the CURSE OF THE GODDESS BE ON ANY WHO DISREGARD THEM. So be it ordained.

51. If you would keep a book, let it be in your own hand of write. Let brothers and sisters copy what they will, but never let the book out of your hands, and never keep the writings of another.

52. For if it be found in their hand of write, they may be taken and arraigned. Let each guard his own writings and destroy them

53. whenever danger threatens.

54. Learn as much as you may by heart and, when danger is past, rewrite your book, an it be safe.

55. For this reason, if any die, destroy their book if they have not been able to.

56. For, if it be found, `tis clear proof against them.

57. And our oppressors know well "Ye may not be a witch alone".

58. So all their kin and friends be in danger of torture.

59. So destroy everything not necessary.

60. If your book be found on you, `tis clear proof against you alone, you may be arraigned.

61. Keep all thoughts of the craft from your mind.

62. If the torture be too great to bear, say, "I will confess. I can't bear this torture. What do you want me to say?"

63. If they try to make you speak of the Brotherhood, do not.

64. But if they try to make you speak of impossibilities such as flying through the air, consorting with a Christian devil or sacrificing children, or eating men's flesh.

65. To obtain relief from torture say, "I had an evil dream I was beside myself, I was crazed."

66. Not all magistrates are bad, if there be an excuse, they may show mercy.

67. If you have confessed ought, deny it afterwards, say you babbled under torture, and say you knew not what you said.

68. If you are condemned, fear not.

69. The Brotherhood is powerful and will help you to escape if you stand steadfast, but if you betray ought there is no hope for you in this life or in that to come.

70. Be sure, if steadfast you go to the pyre, drugs will reach you, you will feel naught you go to death and what lies beyond, the ecstasy of the goddess.

71. To avoid discovery, let the working tools be as ordinary things that any may have in their houses.

72. Let the pentacles be of wax so that they may be broken at once or melted.

73. Have no sword unless your rank allows it.

74. Have no names or signs on anything.

75. Write the names and signs on them in ink before consecrating them and wash it off immediately afterwards.

76. Let the color of the hilts tell which is which.

77. Do not engrave them unless they cause discovery.

78. Ever remember ye are the hidden children of the Goddess so never do anything to disgrace them or Her.

79. Never boast, never threaten, never say you would wish ill of anyone.

80. If any person not in the Circle, speak of the craft, say, "Speak not to me of such, it frightens me, 'tis evil luck to speak of it.

81. For this reason, the Christians have their spies everywhere. These speak as if they were well affected to us, as if they wouldn't come into our meetings, saying, "My mother used to worship the Old Ones. I would I could go myself."

82. To such as these ever deny all knowledge.

83. But to others, ever say, "Tis foolish men talk of witches flying through the air. To do so they must be as light as thistledown. And men say that witches all be blear eyed old crones, so what pleasure can there be at a witch meeting such as folks talk on?"

84. And say, "Many wise men now say there be no such creatures."

85. Ever make it a jest, and in some future time perhaps, the persecution may die and we may worship our gods in safety again.

86. Let us all pray for that happy day.

87. May the blessings of the Goddess and God be on all who keep these Laws which are ordained.

88. If the craft hath any appendage, let all guard it and witchcraft in the land," because our oppressors of old make it heresy not to believe in witchcraft and so a crime to deny it which thereby puts you under suspicion.

89. And let all justly guard all monies of the craft.

90. And if any Brother truly wrought it, 'tis right they have their pay, an it be just. An this be not taking money for the art, but for good and honest work.

91. And even the Christians say, "The laborer is worthy of his hire," but if any Brother work willingly for the good of the craft without pay, 'tis but to their greater honor. So be it ordained.

92. If there be any dispute or quarrel among the Brethren, the High Priestess shall straightly convene the Elders and enquire into the matter, and they shall hear both sides, first alone and then together.

93. And they shall decide justly, not favoring one side or the other.

94. Ever recognizing there be people who can never agree to work under others.

95. But at the same time; there be some people who cannot rule justly.

96. To those who ever must be chief, there is one answer.

97. Void the Coven or seek another one, or make a Coven of your own, taking with you those who will go.

98. To those who cannot, justly the answer be, "Those who cannot bear your rule will leave with you.

99. For none may come to meetings with those whom they are at variance.

100. So, an either cannot agree, get hence, for the craft must ever survive, so be it ordained.

101. In the olden days when we had power, we could use the art against any who ill-treated the Brotherhood. But in these evil days we must not do so. For our enemies have devised a burning pit of everlasting fire into which they say their god casteth all the people who worship him, except it be the very few who are released by their priests, spells and masses. And this be chiefly by giving monies and rich gifts to receive his favor for their great god is ever in need of money.

102. But as our gods need our aid to make fertility for man and crops, so is the god of the Christians ever in need of man's help to search out and destroy us. Their priests ever tell them that any who get our help are damned to this hell forever, so men be mad with the terror of it.

103. But they make men believe that they may escape this hell if they give victims to the tormentors. So for this reason all be forever spying, thinking, "And I can catch but one of these Wicca, I will escape from this fiery pit."

104. So for this reason we have our hides, and men searching long and Doth finding, say, "There be none, or if there be, they be in a far country."

105. But when one of our oppressors die, or even be sick, ever is the cry, "This be witches' malice", and the hunt is up again. And though they slay ten of their own to one of ours, still they care not. They have countless thousands.

106. While we are few indeed. So be it ordained.

107. That none shall use the art in any way to do ill to any.

108. However much they injure us, harm none. And now times many believe we exist not.

109. That this Law shall ever continue to help us in our plight, no one, however great an injury or injustice they receive, may use the art in any way to do ill, or harm any. But they may, after great consultations with all, use the art to restrain Christians from harming us Brothers, but only to constrain them and never to punish.

110. To this end men will say, "Such a one is a mighty searcher out, and a persecutor of old women when they desire to be witches, and none hath done him harm, so it be proof that they cannot or more truly there be none.

111. For all know full well that so many folk have died because someone had a grudge against them, or were persecuted because they had money or goods to seize, or because they had none to bribe the searchers. And many have died because they were scolding old women. So much that men now say that only old women are witches.

112. And this be to our advantage and turns suspicion away from us.

113. In England and Scotland `tis now many a year since a witch hath died the death. But any misuse of the power might raise the persecution again.

114. So never break this Law, however much you are tempted, and never consent to its being broken in the least.

115. If you know it is being broken, you must work strongly against it.

116. And any High Priestess or High Priest who consents to its breach must immediately be deposed for tis the blood of the Brethren they endanger.

117. Do good, an it be safe, and only if it be safe.

118. And strictly keep to the Old Law.

119. Never accept money for the work of the art, for money ever smeareth the taker. 'Tis sorcerers and conjurors and the priests of the Christians who ever accept money for the use of their arts. And they sell pardons to let men escape from their sins.

120. Be not as these. If you accept no money, you will be free from temptation to use the art for evil causes.

121. All may use the art for their own advantage or for the advantage of the craft only if you are sure you harm none.

122. But ever let the Coven debate this at length. Only if all are satisfied that none may be harmed, may the art be used.

123. If it is not possible to achieve your ends one way, perchance the aim may be achieved by acting in a different way so as to harm none. MAY THE CURSE OF THE GODDESS BE UPON ANY WHO BREAKETH THIS LAW. So be it ordained.

124. 'Tis judged lawful if ever any of the craft need a house or land and none will sell, to incline the owner's mind so as to be willing to sell, provided it harmeth him not in any way and the full price is paid without haggling.

125. Never bargain or cheapen anything whilst you buy by the art. So be it ordained.

126. 'Tis the Old Law and the most important of all laws, that no one may do anything which will endanger any of the craft, or bring them into contact with the law of the land or any persecutors

127. In any dispute between the Brethren, no one may invoke any laws but those of the craft.

128. Or any tribunal but that of the Priestess, Priest and Elders.

129. It is not forbidden to say as Christians do, "There be witchcraft in the land," because our oppressors of old make it heresy not to believe in witchcraft and so a crime to deny it which thereby puts you under suspicion.

130. But ever say, "I know not of it here, perchance there may be but afar off, I know not where."

131. But ever speak of them as old crones, consorting with the devil and riding through the air.

132. And ever say, "But how may many ride the air if they be not as light as thistledown."

133. But the curse of the Goddess be on any who cast suspicion on any of the Brotherhood.

134. Or who speak of any real meeting place or where they bide.

135. Let the craft keep books with the names of all herbs which are good, and all cures so all may learn.

136. But keep another book with all Bills and Apices and let only the Elders and other trustworthy people have this knowledge. So be it ordained.

137. And may the blessings of the gods be on all who keep these Laws, and the curses of both the God and the Goddess be on all who break them.

138. Remember the art is the secret of the gods and may only be used in earnest and never for show or vain glory.

139. Magicians and Christians may taunt us saying, "You have no power, show us your power. Do magic before our eyes, then only will we believe," seeking to cause us to betray the art before them.

140. Heed them not, for the art is holy and may only be used in need, and the curse of the gods be on any who break this Law.

141. It ever be the way with women and with men also, that they ever seek new love.

142. Nor should we reprove them for this.

143. But it may be found a disadvantage to the craft.

144. And so many a time it has happened that a High Priest or a High Priestess, impelled by love, hath departed with their love. That is, they have left the Coven.

145. Now if the High Priestess wishes to resign, she may do so in full Coven.

146. And this resignation is valid.

147. But if they should run off without resigning, who may know if they may not return in a few months?

148. So the Law is, if a High Priestess leaves her Coven, she be taken back and all be as before.

149. Meanwhile, if she has a deputy, that deputy shall act as High Priestess for as long as the High Priestess is away.

150. If she returns not at the end of a year and a day, then shall the Coven elect a new High Priestess.

151. Unless there is a good reason to the contrary.

152. The person who has done the work shall reap the benefit of the reward, maiden and deputy of the High Priestess.

153. It had been found that practicing the art doth cause a fondness between aspirant and tutor, and it is the cause of better results if this be so.

154. And if for any reason this be undesirable, it can easily be avoided by both persons from the outset firmly resolving in their minds to be as brother and sister, or parent and child.

155. And it is for this reason that a man may be taught only by a woman and a woman by a man, and women and women should not attempt these practices together. So be it ordained.

156. Order and discipline must be kept.

157. A High Priestess or a High Priest may, and should, punish all faults.

158. To this end all fault and his sentence pronounced.

159. All properly prepared, the culprit should be told his fault, and his sentence pronounced.

160. Punishment should be followed by something amusing.

161. The culprit must acknowledge the justice of the punishment by kissing the hand on receiving sentence and again thanking for punishment received. So be it ordained.